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Different parameters for Knowledge Organization in archives

Abstract
This article seeks to reflect on different knowledge organization parameters in respect of archives. It discusses
the different ways we contextualize records and how retrieving this information can help with archival
organization of documents, providing evidence of the source and preservation conditions undergone by an
archive or collection throughout the trajectory of documents from production until their definitive keeping. In
this regard, we believe data domain to be of utmost importance for institutional, administrative, archival
history and custodial trajectory of records. As a result, record contextualization – one of archive science’s
main purposes – based on distinct articulated perspectives, occurs more fully and integrally, offering the user
full and consubstantiated access to the record.

The archival notion of knowledge organization is closely related to the process of
functional contextualization of records. However, what is rarely discussed are the
different parameters that can be adopted for knowledge organization (KO) in the sphere
of archival science. Therefore, this paper proposes a reflection on the importance of
recovering information regarding the history of the entity and the custodial trajectory
of a file from creation of a document until it enters a permanent archive for the purpose
of record, information contextualization and consequent knowledge organization
relating to archival collections.

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from creation of a record until it enters a repository for processing, information
contextualization and consequent knowledge organization.

Birger Hjørland (2016) states that

“KO is about describing, representing, filing and organizing documents and document
representations as well as subjects and concepts both by humans and by computer programs. For
these purposes, rules and standards are developed, including classification systems, lists of subject
headings, thesauri and other forms of metadata. The organization of knowledge into classification
systems and concept systems are core subjects in KO. The two main aspects of KO are (1)
knowledge organization processes (KOP) and (2) knowledge organization systems (KOS).
Knowledge organization processes (KOP) are, for example, the processes of cataloging, subject
analysis, indexing and classification by humans or computers. Knowledge organization systems
(KOS) are the selection of concepts with an indication of selected semantic relations”.

In addition, according to the author, the organization of archival knowledge should
be considered part of knowledge organization itself (Hjørland 2016). On the other hand,
Mario Barité (2001) states that the first basic premise of knowledge organization is the understanding of knowledge as a product and social need. Dahlberg (1993) points out the important fact that knowledge does not exist without concept. Therefore, information retrieval from an information organization system depends on a pre-established logic of the concept itself.

When we consider different processes for organization of knowledge in the context of archival science, we are faced with more than one way to contextualize records. Therefore, choosing one kind of historical information as a parameter for archival processing, in the same way as recovering the knowledge of the systems for keeping custody of a set of documents that have the same origin, reveal the criteria adopted for archival organization.

Among the options considered here, we discuss the boundaries between institutional history/biography and administrative history of the entity of origin in the records as well as the archival history and custodial trajectory of records and how they lead to specific knowledge providing a greater understanding of the bureaucratic-social system of creation, use and filing of records. Dictionaries and glossaries of archival terminology do not usually define the above-mentioned expressions although we recurrently come across them in the specialized literature in the area. As a rule, the use of these terms, when used in texts on archives and documentation is more intuitive than based on methodological procedures of information and contextualization of records.

There are only a few reference works that address the topic. However, we sought to track some information for a definition. For this, we consulted *Diccionário de Terminologia Arquivística* (Camargo e Bellotto 2012), *Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology* (Pearce-Moses 2005), *Lenguaje y Vocabulario Archivísticos* (Heredia Herrera 2011), *Diccionario de Archivistica* (Cruz Mundet 2011) and others.

What we saw when we analyzed reference books is that very few of them define the terms to which we refer, though we find descriptions relating to them. In a way, this shows a gap in the bibliography, given that they are terms frequently used in the day-to-day collection of organization work, normally applied indiscriminately. Often, these expressions are incorporated into the methodology of archival work, such as for example in procedures that are essential for creating a classification scheme, in the context of national and international standards of archival descriptions, such as ISAD(G) (2000) and Nobrade (2006)

One of the sources found in the bibliography is referenced in the *Diccionario de Archivistica* organized by Cruz Mundet (2011). In the entry for history, the author mentions the existing relationship between history, archival science and their various facets. Overall, he establishes five points of intersection, mainly derived from those used by different description rules, which we reproduce below:

**Administrative, institutional or biographical history:** an element of ISAD(G) consistent with the synthesis of origin, evolution, development and work of entity or entities, person or physical
persons responsible for the production of document grouping is to put records into their context and ensure they are better understood, briefly annotating any significant information.

Archival history: an element of ISAD(G), which provides information on changes in ownership and custody of a descriptive unit that is significant. (Cruz Mundet 2011, p. 200-201)

As we can see in Cruz Mundet’s definition, the terms administrative, institutional, biographical and archival science were used together in two distinct definitions. In the first, despite their essential differences, concepts are equivalent when they assign the same function to their use. The second refers to the issue of ownership and custody; however, it does not mention interventions resulting from archival organization in its different phases.

It is important to note that, in both cases, the terms defined are shown as descriptive fields of ISAD(G), instead of being presented as elements to be retrieved within a mandatory methodological procedure for archival organization work. Thus, they normally refer to descriptive components – taking into account their position in the standard – rather than being understood as instrumental information that aids the archival knowledge organization process.

Different histories, different perspectives for knowledge organization

Recovery of institutional history is of fundamental importance for the organization of any archive since such history reveals bureaucratic practices and transformations encountered by entities throughout their existence. To get to know the entity organization system, identifying functions, activities and procedures, leads to the understanding of record system mechanisms and access to information and, consequently, to contextualization of record creation.

However, further to building a timeline, based on institutional milestones, other perspectives are involved and reveal themselves to be compelling in respect to the record organization process. We refer to a diversity of parameters adopted for recovery of an entity’s history and the custodial trajectory of its archive.

In archival science, institutional history is a very useful tool because it provides the knowledge of facts, elements and specific characteristics of a given administrative apparatus. It equally provides the knowledge of fundamental elements for creating an efficient information retrieval system as well as information on previous processes and phases in the archival organization of a set of documents.

According to Flórez (2010), institutional history analyses institutions’ organic and functional evolution and should be based on legal and chronological rules, taking into account the cycle in which the institution, which is the object of the study, is found, and also in the set of legal rules that structure it. Thus, according to the archival perspective, institutional history should encompass structure, function and evolution of organization, and is an integral part of the principle of origin.

What Flórez (2010) refers to as institutional history, in ISAD(G) appears as
“administrative/biographical history”, with a similar meaning and featuring as one of the elements present in the standard descriptive plan. According to ISAD(G), administrative/biographical history provides information that contributes to administrative or biographical history relating to the institution to facilitate understanding. As a rule, it guides the archivist to enter, in this descriptive field, any kind of information on the history of the collection to be described.

3.2.2 Administrative / Biographical history

Purpose: To provide an administrative history of, or biographical details on, the creator (or creators) of the unit of description to place the material in context and make it better understood.

Rules: Record concisely any significant information on the origin, progress, development and work of the organization (or organizations) or on the life and work of the individual (or individuals) responsible for the creation of the unit of description. If additional information is available in a published source, cite the source (ISAD(G) 2000, p. 18).

The administrative/biographical history field is one of the two intersection points between ISAD(G) and ISAAR(CPF), together with the name of the creator, who controls the authority registration. Both provide contextual information.

The elements of an Authority Record of ISAAR(CPF) – Identity Area, Description Area, Relationships Area and Control Area – suggest retrieval of specific information that may be included in the description of these elements such as full names and titles, dates of birth and death, place of birth, successive domiciles, activities, occupation or jobs, names of origin or any other, significant achievements and place of death for individuals or family.

This standard is intended to be used in conjunction with ISAD(G) - General International Standard Archival Description, 2nd edition and with national archival descriptive standards. When these standards are used together within the context of an archival descriptive system or network, authority records will be linked to descriptions of archives, and vice versa. [...] Descriptions of archives and records can be linked to archival authority records in the Name of creator(s) element (3.2.1) and the Administrative/Biographical history element (3.2.2) of an ISAD(G) compliant description (ISAAR(CPF) 2004, p. 12).

We do not intend to go deeper into the subject because this is not the theme proposed here; however, we have a reservation in respect of the many interpretations of the international ISAD(G) standard. Understanding what content should be addressed by descriptive elements, in the interpretations found for the standard, may lead to differences in the very act of description. For example, we mentioned that the Brazilian version of the standard does not refer to institutional history; instead, it refers to administrative history/biography. Whereas the Spanish version of the standard refers to the descriptive field as institutional history/bibliographic review; in English administrative/biographical history; and in French histoire administrative/notice biographique (ISAD(G), 2000). We can clearly see different approaches, according to the archival tradition of each country.
When we check the descriptive plans presented by various countries and incorporated into ISAD(G) to exemplify how a standard is applied to fonds of different origins and descriptive levels, the lack of uniformity in filling in information in relation to the history of the entity is clear. Standardization is more to do with the name of description than with the content to be described in these fields.

**Custodial trajectory faced with archival history**

On one hand, we have institutional and administrative history that provide us with contextualized information in respect to document production, routines, mission and social penetration of the entity – even serving as a factor of major influence to be considered at the time of document evaluation, especially when faced with primary and secondary values inherent to records. However, there is yet another kind of historical construction that must be considered at the time of contextualization of fonds: archival history.

When mentioning the difficulties in finding definitions for the various historical approaches for contextualizing a collection, we have cited the *Diccionário de Archivística*, by Cruz Mundet (2011), highlighting the fact that the approaches derive from archival description standards. Another reference work that also presents this question, at least partially, is the *Dicionário de Biblioteconomia e Arquivologia*, by Murílio Bastos da Cunha and Cordélia Robalinho de Oliveira Cavalcanti (2008). The authors define “administrative history, custodial history ADM ARQU, collection of information relating to history and structural organization of an institution” (Cunha and Cavalcanti 2008, p.186).

In this definition, we can see, especially through the equivalence of terms in Portuguese and English, a match between administrative history and custodial history. Normally, custodial history refers to the collection *per se*, whereas administrative history, in general, refers to the entity that processes documents. This position differs from that of Cruz Mundet (2011), who tends to treat the definitions of custodial trajectory and archival history as one.

Somewhat coincidentally, there is the guideline found in ISAD(G) for the term archival history, relating the term to information that is significant for authenticity, integrity and interpretation of the descriptive unit. As a rule, it registers information relating to origin and property, similarly to custodial history:

**Rules:** Record the successive transfers of ownership, responsibility and/or custody of the unit of description and indicate those actions, such as history of the arrangement, production of contemporary finding aids, re-use of the records for other purposes or software migrations, that have contributed to its present structure and arrangement. Give the dates of these actions, insofar as they can be ascertained. If the archival history is unknown, record that information (ISAD(G), 2000).

In this respect, archival history encompasses any type of information relating to
ownership, responsibility, custody and maintenance of a collection, as well as the information referring to documentary treatment used for its organization. As a rule, archival history depicts collection interventions relating to processes of organization, preservation and representation of records throughout its life cycle, including permanent interventions. In the cases where descriptive units have been acquired directly from the creator, the standard recommends that such information be registered as precedence rather than archival history because interventions suffered by documentation are the result of custodial procedures of the entity of origin.

Therefore, for ISAD(G), custodial history is an integral part of archival history. Accordingly, data on the custody of a collection should be addressed by archival history.

**Final considerations**

We saw that the distinction between administrative history and institutional history is based on the focus and perspective adopted as a reference. While the former is concerned with recovering organization and functional structures of a given entity and its reflection on document records arises from the execution of its activities, the latter focuses on a wider understanding of the entity, which includes identity, company mission and its role in society. Archival history in turn, is concerned with identifying and understanding the interventions relating to document organization made to a collection. Custodial history studies the trajectory of a collection from creation of records to their preservation and guardianship in close relation to an understanding of document ownership and custody.

The literature found and taken into consideration in this work, for the most part, corresponds to the definitions of history used in the phase of description for contextualization of records. A possible explanation would be perhaps a lack of discussion on the distinct types of contextualizing documents in other phases of archival processing. However, what we came to consider is that contextualization of documents and information is essential for organization of archival knowledge and can collaborate with all the other archival functions – Creation, Appraisal, Acquisition, Conservation, Classification, Description and Dissemination (Rousseau; Couture 1998).

As a result, we have seen throughout this survey that the choice of a parameter to be adopted for contextualization directly interferes in the completeness of the set of information to be used in archival organization and in search aids. Therefore, to speak of institutional history, administrative history or archival history means recovering distinct values that, when interrelated in a descriptive plan, have the ability to reflect more widely the context of a document within its life cycle than when used in isolation. This gives us indications to make us think that distinct dimensions of knowledge should be considered in the phase of information contextualization of an organization.
The survey results lead us to think that information relating to the history of an archive regardless of the parameter adopted reveals aspects that are fundamental for the processes of archival organization – especially those relating to classification and evidence of archival bond. Each one of these histories is equally capable of assisting users of fonds and collections to have access to documentation because it enables them to have access to more consistent and complete information about the collection they are analyzing.

References
Camargo, Ana Maria de Almeida e BELLOTO, Heloísa Liberalli (2012). Dicionário de terminologia arquivística. 3ª ed. SP: ARQ-SP.